

Student Voice at the Middle School

Future politicians test out their voices

LISA DALY AND KELLY GOVONI
ADJUSTMENT COUNSELORS

*"I nominate Curt Jones for president"
"Is there a second for that motion?"
"I second the motion."
"Do you accept the nomination Curt?"*

This is not a dialogue from the Massachusetts State House, but a dialogue from the Student Voice meeting at Shrewsbury Middle School.

The Student Voice was created by middle school students who wanted to bring the concerns and questions of the student body to teachers and administrators. Each September, students are elected by their peers to serve a yearlong term as a member of Student Voice. These students, who represent sixth through eighth graders, meet once a month. Their purpose is to give students a practical knowledge of democracy by active participation in helping to solve school issues, to give the student body an active voice, and to establish higher standards of character, leadership, school spirit, and education.

Student Voice members, while keeping a pulse on peer's concerns and opinions, are involved in community service projects, fundraisers, and awareness campaigns. Change for Charity, volunteering at the Worcester County Food Bank, Kindness Week, and Spirit Week are some of the activities that Student Voice has organized over the past years.

Each year students organize a school function to raise extra money to support the group. This year they are organizing the second annual Middle School Variety Show. Last year's show showcased over 20 acts and raised over \$1,000.

A student who wishes to be a Voice member must prove his/her leadership and citizenship to the entire school community. The motto of Student Voice is, 'To lead by Example'. To this end, students must maintain a high grade point average and be respectful to their teachers and fellow classmates. Once members have been elected to the general body, a further election is held to create a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

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Members of Student Voice feel that the experience has enhanced their leadership skills and given them an opportunity to make a difference in their community.

"Student Voice is a good thing. You know what is going on in your school and can make a change happen," explained Sarah Lord, this year's president.

Gianna Padavano, the treasurer said, "Student Voice is a good way to prepare yourself for future politics."

Jackie Jankowski states that "Student Voice is hard work," she also thinks that in the end, it all pays off. "It's fun and rewarding."

Enhancing education for all

KARYN POLITO
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

In 1993, with the implementation of education reform, Massachusetts took the first giant step in the right direction, implementing new curriculum frameworks through the effort of our professional educators, creating higher academic standards and developing smaller class sizes with state-aided construction of new and improved schools. Since the inception of education reform, state aid has tripled and this investment is paying substantial dividends for Shrewsbury and other cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth.

Working with the legislature, I was able to secure \$213K into Chapter 70 base aid for high growth communities.

Karyn Polito
State Representative

MCAS remains a controversial issue in the eyes of many people across the Commonwealth. This perception persists despite surveys conducted by nonprofit groups like the Mass Insight Education of students who failed at least one part of the 10th grade MCAS. Surveys show these children were neither demoralized nor discouraged but instead more determined to study harder to pass the exam.

When I decided to support the MCAS as a graduation requirement, it was with the goal of raising every child to a competitive level thereby giving them the opportunity to suc-

ceed. Shrewsbury's 10th graders have embraced the ideals voiced by the surveyed students and achieved the goals set by policy-makers, educators and parents across the state. With the education offered in our public schools, 100 percent of the Class of 2003 received a passing score. By incorporating the MCAS into an evolving system of accountability, our children will, in the long run, remain highly competitive as they graduate with their meaningful diplomas to compete on a higher level in future jobs and academia.

Success in reforming public education can only be achieved through cooperation and partnerships. The leaders of our Commonwealth, in cooperation with parents, educators and local policy-makers, must continue working together to help our children succeed. Parents play an integral role in our children's education and must continue to do so.

According to Mass Insight Education, 75 percent of students surveyed agreed that encouragement from a respected adult is the best way to boost participation in support programs that will help children to excel in school and on the MCAS. We are fortunate in Shrewsbury to have such educated and caring parents to support our students.

In these challenging times it will also take leadership to stand firm on our commitment to public education. To do otherwise would be foolish, leading to a regression of progress made. At the same time we need to understand the economic realities we face. On the state level, we are dealing with difficult budget cuts that will directly impact our town and our schools. However, working in partnership, state and local leaders will develop creative and reasonable solutions to weather



Karyn Polito, State Representative

this fiscal storm, which hopefully, soon will pass. It will be during these times that we will need to bolster our constructive relationships and take positive steps in order to succeed.

Already, collaborations are being forged and results are evident. Working with the legislature, I was able to secure \$213K into Chapter 70 base aid for high growth communities. Additionally, working with my colleagues, I am supportive of legislation to extend from five to seven years, the time for towns in which to repay the loans on school buildings.

At the request of local officials, I filed legislation to establish a special fund, which will apply interest earnings to reduce the debt service payments on the school construction projects. These are but a few of the steps that we have started to take this year. As we reflect upon the progress achieved this past year, I look forward to continuing this productive work in order to guarantee the academic success of our children.

Numbers expanding at preschool

Preschool, from page 4

the next 5-6 years through 2007-08. The school committee felt very strongly that the existing Parker Road Preschool site was not a conducive site for appropriately accommodating 400+ potential preschool children and staff. The school committee felt that the larger and more expensive free standing building plans would also create significant traffic issues and safety concerns in a very small and congested area, not to mention that these plans would disrupt adjacent fields and impact valuable town recreation space.

Given the fact that all of these plans were not "reimbursable" by the state and realizing our growing need for an additional elementary school that would qualify for state reimbursement and possibly include a preschool wing (if the need still existed), the school committee unanimously agreed that the best value for the town would be to forego the larger more expensive preschool plans and address our more immediate preschool needs with a plan that makes more fiscal and practical sense for both our children and our community not only over the next 5-6 years but over the next 20 years, as well.

After much thoughtful analysis, the school committee believed that the proposal for a 5 classroom addi-



PHOTO BY DAWNA ALPHONSE

Meaghan Travers and Chalane Miller play with building blocks as their teacher Kara Vincelette works with another student.

tion to the Parker Road facility was the most cost effective solution to our preschool space needs problem.

Given the urgency for our need

for space at the preschool level and the completion of more in-depth analysis, we look forward to Town Meeting and presenting our recommendation.